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# Federal Trade Commission Hosts Pro-Censorship Event

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On Wednesday, June 4, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) hosted an event entitled "The Attention Economy: How Big Tech Firms Exploit Children and Hurt Families." The speakers hailed from a variety of religious anti-porn organizations, including the Heritage Foundation, NCOSE, Family Policy Alliance, American Principles Project, and Ethics and Public Policy Center.

The event was organized by newly-installed FTC senior policy advisor Jon Schweppe, who came to this role directly from the American Principles Project, where he advocated for age-verification legislation as the group's the Policy Director. Schweppe made a point of mentioning that "our friend Iain Corby with the Age Verification Providers Association" was in attendance.

The topics of age verification and pornography came up many times over the course of the event. The FTC made it clear that it plans to "using everything available in [its] toolbox to hold companies accountable" for what children do online – including finding creative ways to take enforcement action using existing and newly-passed laws. The FTC Chairman explicitly called for going "beyond the current legal regime, which conditions unfettered access to online services on nothing more than an unverified, self-reported birthdate" and spoke approvingly about state age-verification laws targeting adult content.

ACCEPT

Throughout the event, FTC leadership and their allies made plain their intentions to spread unconstitutional age-verification policies nationwide and attack the adult industry's very right to exist.

## Nationwide Age Verification

There was consensus among the panelists that state-based age-verification laws do not satisfy their ultimate goals. A representative from the American Principles Project said, "There's really no reason why we shouldn't eventually get some sort of nationwide age verification legislation passed. And I'm very optimistic and hopeful that we'll get that very soon."

Recognizing that they will face pushback to bills like the SCREEN Act, Family Policy Alliance's panelist shared that their strategy will be to leverage the recent bipartisan support for the TAKE IT DOWN Act, telling the audience that when legislators "who didn't oppose TAKE IT DOWN start coming up and opposing these [bills], we have to be willing to poke and prod and figure out, okay, what's different about this? Because these objectives are all clearly interrelated and easily intuitive. So why are you opposing this one not the other?" Of course, the stated goals of the bills are completely different, but this argument illuminates that the motivating force behind them is the same: increased control over the content that Americans can see and post online.

## Vilifying the Adult Industry

From bizarre, unscientific claims about porn addiction to denials that the First Amendment protects sexual content, many of the speakers used the spotlight to slander and malign the adult industry. When asked about the opposition to age-verification laws, the rep from the Family Policy Alliance went on a grotesque rant:

> "[T]he pornography industry is part larger of the overall sex industry, which includes prostitution, sex trafficking. They're all one and the same. They are the biggest objector to this under the guise of free speech champions. And frankly, I'm going to be very honest here, they're some of the most nefarious

> actors on this planet. They profit off of lies, off of misery, off violence and off addiction. That's who opposes this. And they believe it is an affirmative moral good that kids should be able to have access to pornography without their parents' knowledge or consent, which is why they have refused to collaborate with I think all but one of these state laws. So that's who our big opponent is, and that is the main line they take, whether explicitly or not, they know how dependent they are on underage consumers. And that's at the heart of this is it's not about free speech, it's about a business model built on taking advantage of kids without parental consent and leaving them broken."

Banning Porn

Labeling himself as "part of a small but growing group of people" who think that the Supreme Court cases establishing First Amendment protections for adult content were incorrectly decided, the Family Policy Alliance rep revealed that he is "doing some research into how we might be able to chip away at their efficacy and the precedent" in order to ban sexually-explicit content entirely. Showing his poor grasp of science and even feebler understanding of the Constitution, he trotted out the debunked-but-ubiquitous claim that pornography affects the brain similarly to heroin, and pointed out that "you don't have a First Amendment right to access heroin."

Later, an associate dean from a right-wing Christian college opined, "If we're going to keep self-government alive for the next 100 years, we're going to have to get serious about realizing that pornography has nothing to do with the glorious right of speech to help each other be good. It's a totally different category, and we have to get there and eventually we have to get the slowest of us, i.e. judges, to see it as well."

The panelists also seemed to see the *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton* Supreme Court case as a stepping stone to their goal of banning pornography by overturning prior precedent, theorizing that if FSC loses, it will clear the way for further restrictions on adult content.

More of the Pro-censorship Agenda

In addition to the support expressed for the TAKE IT DOWN and SCREEN Acts, panelists rallied around the following legislative proposals:

- App Store Accountability Act: would require app stores to verify users' ages, but not provide that information to websites (enforced by the FTC)
- Kids Online Safety Act: would require online platforms to “prevent and mitigate" harms to minors (enforced by the FTC)
- CASE IT Act: "would take away the 230 protections that we offer for pornographic websites that are not using safeguards to protect our children," according to the panelist from the American Principles Project
- Adding age verification requirements to the next revision of the Child Online Privacy and Protection Act (COPPA)
- Passing a private right of action for porn addiction to "get the porn industry to stand up and take notice".

The FTC also made it clear that they plan to test the limits of their authority, including by expanding their use of Section 5 of FTC Act (which prohibits "unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce") to go after targets they disfavor. In a sharp break from other administration policies, there were multiple calls to adopt measures modeled after European Commission regulations.

This government-sponsored event was not a good-faith conversation about child safety — it was a strategy session for censorship. With federal regulators, religious conservatives, and anti-porn crusaders aligned on a common goal, the adult industry is facing an unprecedented, coordinated campaign to undermine its legal protections, distort public perception, and criminalize consensual adult expression. The FTC’s embrace of this agenda is not just deeply troubling — it’s a direct threat to the First

Amendment rights of millions of creators, platforms, and consumers. We must remain vigilant and organized, because this isn't just about age verification. It's about erasing our right to exist.

AGE VERIFICATION

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